

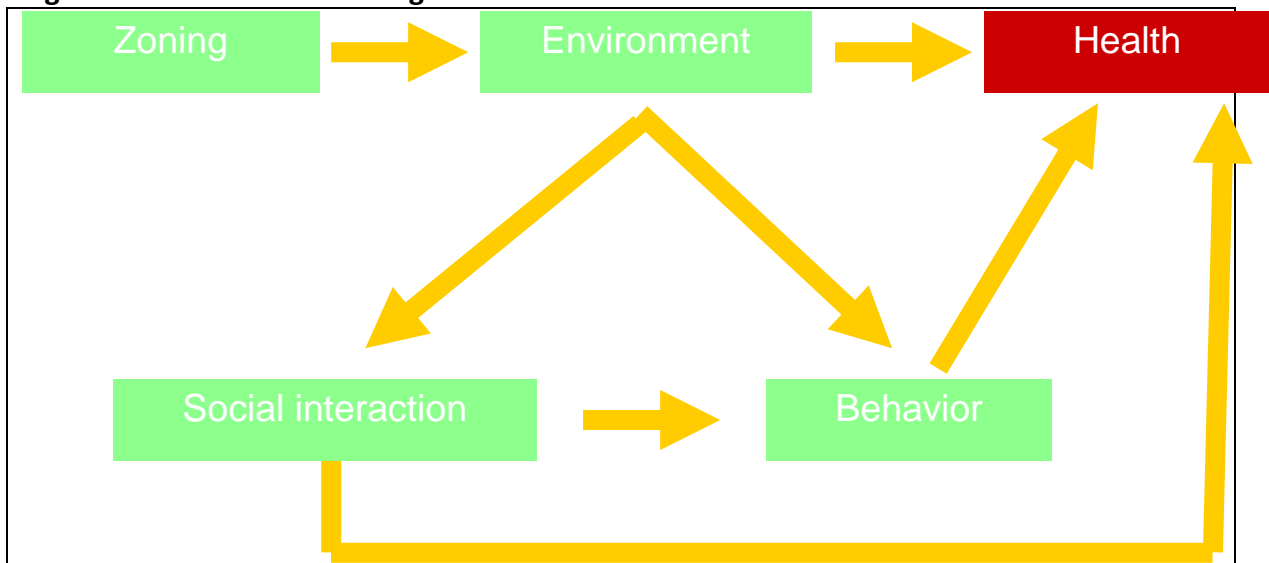
Public Health Work Group

11-17-2008

What is the topic?

One of the main purposes of zoning is to protect the general health and welfare. Current understanding of health protection and promotion has changed since the last zoning code rewrite. Public health today focuses on disease prevention as well as health promotion by creating the conditions in which an individual can be healthy. Public health is increasingly guided by principles of equity and justice. Health is understood as the product of context and multilevel influences, including individual, environmental and fundamental factors. Environmental level influences include features of the built environment, which can influence health both directly and indirectly by shaping social interactions and individual behaviors (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Model of how zoning can influence health



Zoning regulations play a key role in shaping the built environment and its impact on health. The following is a discussion of how zoning can: promote public health; avoid creating barriers to public health; and incentivize health-promoting measures. The recommendations below are the culmination of public health and planning literature and community recommendations from a public meeting held on November 13, 2008.

Primary health issues in Baltimore as identified by the Baltimore City Health Department include: alcohol and drug use, asthma, cancer, crime, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, HIV/AIDS, injury and safety, low birth weight, infant mortality, mental health and smoking.

Community members are additionally concerned about: lead poisoning as related to crime,



food sources, unclean streets, rats, lack of healthcare providers, noise, sleep deprivation, siting of research, heat and climate control, incompatible land uses for health, bicycle safety, pedestrian safety, sexually transmitted diseases, physical inactivity, lung disease, access for people with disabilities, distribution of pollutants, unequal burden of pollutants and other environmental contaminants by race and poverty, public education location, access to physical education, physical activity, and health issues for discharged prisoners.

The following sections offer possibilities for addressing many of these health issues directly and indirectly through the zoning code.

How does the current approach impact development?

When the current zoning code was created in 1971, the primary purpose of zoning was based on the pressing public health concerns of a City that had been rapidly growing, economically restructuring from its industrial past, and trying to accommodate new ways of living that included increasing automobile ownership. To this day, the purposes of zoning are the following:

- (1) to lessen congestion in the streets;*
- (2) to secure safety from fire, panic, and other dangers;*
- (3) to promote health and the general welfare;*
- (4) to provide adequate light and air;*
- (5) to prevent the overcrowding of land;*
- (6) to avoid undue concentration of population;*
- (7) to facilitate adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks, and other public requirements;*
- (8) to conserve the value of buildings and other structures;*
- (9) to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and*
- (10) to divide the City into zoning districts of the character, number, shape, and area best suited to effect these purposes. (§ 1-401)*

The principles of zoning from 1971 have inadvertently caused barriers and given rise to the types of public health concerns Baltimoreans have today such as obesity which can be linked to lack of walkable spaces or adequate access to healthy food. While the zoning code is limited in the way that it addresses public health, it can help promote general health and welfare by creating conditions in which individuals can be healthy. Using this approach in concert with research-based evidence and an understanding of local experience, the code has the capacity to positively impact health more fully than it currently does.

The following notes include ways in which the zoning code can be changed to better promote health and ways in which the zoning code can better protect Baltimore citizens from negative influences on health. Additionally, community members have expressed



concern about the degree of evaluation and enforcement of aspects of the current code which may have health impacts.

What issues should TransForm Baltimore aim to address?

Our recommendations for zoning for public health fall into six categories (further outlined in the next question):

- **Increased green space requirements:** Green space impacts health in many ways. It creates opportunities for exercise, escape and relaxation. Attractive places for recreation and exercise can play a role in reducing obesity and cardiovascular disease. Green space, particularly trees, can limit negative environmental exposure by serving as a barrier from pollutants. Trees, grasses and shrubs limit the urban heat island effect, help to improve water quality, provide shade and create habitat for wildlife. These may positively influence a wide range of health outcomes, including mental health, asthma, obesity, and crime. Tending to and recreating in green spaces helps improve social interaction and neighborhood cohesiveness, factors that improve well-being and health.
- **Zone for increased social interaction:** This recommendation seeks to promote opportunities for social interaction. Increased social interaction has a positive effect on a variety of health-related outcomes, including mental health and crime prevention, by increasing social support, enhancing community connection, promoting community involvement and caretaking and creating opportunities for social and economic resources. Feeling safe can influence extent of physical activity and neighborhood cohesion, both of which also contribute to mental health and other health outcomes
- **Zone for completeness in neighborhoods:** This recommendation refers to the need for mixed use space and availability of diversity and a wide variety of different land uses within a neighborhood. Community design towards completeness enables equitable and convenient distribution of a range of services (grocery stores, pharmacies, schools, post office, banks), increases physical activity through walkability, creates opportunities for social interaction and promotes economic well-being through job creation and locally available income generation opportunities.
- **Separate healthy and unhealthy uses as understood in 2008 and beyond:** This recommendation refers to aspects of land use which contribute to improved health and those which create barriers to health. Land use and design dimensions which promote and hinder health can be separated through regulation and incentive. Of particular concern is the proximity of certain uses/impacts to vulnerable populations. These uses/impacts include proximity to environmental pollutants, noise, density of fast food stores or liquor outlets near schools. As a corollary, compatible uses should also increasingly be brought together to better promote health. Zoning regulations should account for possible future uses as well, and look ahead to address climate change related



issues.

- **Use sustainable and energy efficient building practices and materials for new development and infill:** This recommendation refers to the health impact of physical space and building materials, which can contribute to asthma, physical activity and mental health. Use of less hazardous building materials decreases possible exposures for workers and the adjacent community. This will also help reduce energy costs.
- **Zoning process and procedure improvements:** This category aims to address procedural aspects of zoning that can better promote health. Topics include enforcement, addressing past problems, and incorporating health concerns into the review process

What proposed approaches should be considered during TransForm Baltimore?

(1) Green Space

- a. Require minimum green space for housing, retail, and commercial developments
- b. Require maintenance of green space and parks
- c. Vegetative buffer between roads and residents, streets and sidewalks
- d. Vegetative buffers along all water sources (streams, rivers, lakes, bays)

(2) Zone for increased social interaction

- a. Require wide sidewalks in mixed use areas to allow for outdoor seating
- b. Zone for public gathering space for outdoor concerts, farmers markets, community gardens, festivals
- c. Outside lighting for entrances, walkways and parking lots
- d. Landscaping with groundcover and trees to allow visibility, show ownership and enhance pedestrian environment [example of 2.5 foot window of visibility 3 feet from ground]
- e. For new buildings, require certain percentage allocated for public use (e.g. Anchorage, AK)

(3) Zone for completeness

- a. Mixed land use
- b. Incentives for services such as health care, post office, fresh fruit and vegetable grocers, recreation facilities in neighborhoods that lack these facilities
- c. Encourage diversity of use and population: artist, low income, single family vs. multi-unit, elderly
 - i. Low-income and low-threshold housing options
- d. Zoning policies that favor accessory dwelling units and other options that account for unusual household composition
- e. Ensure that zoning facilitates availability and access, with equitable



- distribution and options outside of high density areas
 - i. Drug treatment
 - ii. Mental health services
 - iii. Shelters
 - iv. Transitional housing
 - v. Healthcare and pharmacies
 - vi. Harm reduction services
- f. Zoning for job creation within neighborhoods
- g. Zoning to allow/ enable small scale business operations in residential areas
 - i. incentivizing health promoting business
- h. Enable vacant housing/abandoned lots to be used for gardens, green space, or more easily developed for small business
- i. Public use overlay area
- j. Zoning for high quality facilities for education, accounting for design standards for greenspace, recreational facilities, building appearance, safety promotion

(4) Separation of healthy and unhealthy functions

- a. Keep schools, residences, day care centers and nursing homes at least 200m from major roads
- b. Allow the existing Public Use Overlay designation to signify where public use buildings may be located in the future.
- c. Limit number and concentration of alcohol outlets in a neighborhood; limit outlet proximity to each other and to schools and playgrounds
- d. Direct major truck traffic away from neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, day care, and nursing homes
- e. Limit tobacco outlet proximity to schools and outlet density in neighborhoods where there are schools
- f. Consider possibilities for incentivizing accessibility of nutritional food options and reducing density and proximity of fast food outlets to schools, youth facilities, playgrounds.
- g. Incentives for health promoting business and industry, i.e. high quality fruits/vegetables; green manufacturing
- h. Continued environmental justice and equity considerations in siting of dumps and toxic waste
 - i. Separate from residential areas (particularly for low-income areas)
- i. Consider noise performance standards for residential, commercial and manufacturing use

(5) New development use sustainable and energy efficient building practices

- a. New parking lots and other paved surfaces to use permeable, light-colored pavement
- b. Street improvements: bike lanes, crosswalks at all intersections, shade trees



- along walkways, increase walkability of sidewalks and paths
- c. Demolition process
 - i. Require greater recycling and reuse standards
 - ii. Enforce limits on noise, dust and truck traffic
 - iii. Enforce mechanisms to limit exposure to construction particles and pollution
- d. New roofs to use light-colored materials
- e. Orient, design and use materials that are energy efficient and limit impacts of hot weather
- f. Use energy efficient lighting

(6) Improvements to Zoning Process

- a. Consider health vulnerability and cumulative disadvantage in allocation of zoning regulations
- b. Require Health Impact Assessment for siting of new businesses / operations / changes in land use / redevelopment of brownfields and abandoned properties – including:
 - i. engagement of all stakeholders, including the community members
 - ii. Monitoring and evaluation. Including recourse for unintended consequences of zoning.
- c. Consider public health criteria as a basis to modify or deny zoning variances or appeals.
- d. Consider how to effectively enforce zoning and transportation laws (i.e. truck routes are established but are not always followed thereby bringing truck traffic onto residential streets. How can zoning address this?)
- e. Consider health consequences of industries / operations that were grandfathered into the current zoning code. (i.e. what can current zoning do to address concerns from past: can zoning address problems around the bus depot?)
- f. Consider context when considering impacts of proposed land use (i.e. designation of “mixed use” for development may only be successful in the long run given presence of other conditions in a neighborhood or community).